

# West African Mission Update

September 2006

Steve & Patricia Phillips

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Dear Brethren,

Eight foot tall elephant grass provides a swaying corridor on narrow footpaths, as we trek to interior villages in the blackness of the African night.

A hapless snake never reached its destination as it succumbed to a blow from a handy stick wielded by brother Peters. But the presence of an even deadlier serpent of old is all too evident when entering these settlements.

Naked children warily yet excitedly greet us from a distance. They soon wax bold and venture to draw near for a tenuous handshake. It is then that you behold their filthy bodies, rarely bathed except for periodic romping in the torrential downpours that frequent this region.

Open infected skin ulcers are the norm. Blackened rotting teeth coupled with the ever present malnutrition are not infrequently present. Gaunt infants with thin orange tinted hair, distended bellies, and skin hanging loosely in folds around emaciated limbs testify to the harshness of an impoverished life in the bush.

Amulets and talismans are affixed to the waist, wrist, and/or neck from birth, the removal of which invites disaster and death. Charlatans and bush devils terrorize the night and keep multitudes shackled in superstition and spiritual bondage in this land where the gospel has not been preached during the living memory of the aged.

All they know is only a vacuous and uncertain hope of bliss in the afterlife, proffered by Islam through the vagaries of their unpredictable Allah. In the

present, it offers no solution to the exceeding weight of the guilt of sin, no peace and assurance of heart, and no relief from the gnawing fear of death and its awaiting terrors.

Most in this region have been initiated into spiritist secret societies and the females subjected to ritual circumcision. Sexual immorality is so commonplace as to not arouse any alarm to their defiled conscience. Treachery and devious dealings characterize many.

Heretofore, Christ's grace and love have not been proclaimed.

Some 12 wretched mud-plastered hovels with rotting grass or rusty galvanized roofs serve as shelters in this village about 2 km from our own house here in the bush. We addressed 30 or so who had gathered to hear the novel message from the stranger in their midst.

When the elderly were asked if in all of their years of praying five times daily the guilt of their sin and fear of death had been removed, they unanimously answered, "No!"

"What then must we do to be saved?," asked one of these wearied and precious souls nearing the brink of eternity.

Imagine the pathos of the scene and envision with what heartfelt gladness and urgency the blessed gospel of the eternal God was unfolded to these anxious benighted souls who have never once heard of such a God, of such a blessed Redeemer, mighty and willing to save.

It was a glad day. We trust that there were also angels on high raising their notes of joy with those sounding forth from the throne and from the Lamb.

After weeks of repeated visits to Tekeyeh preaching the glad tidings of repentance from dead works to serve the living God, there are two men who

have come forward to follow the Jesus way. Quintin meets with them weekly now for Bible study and will begin teaching them to read as well. This week, nine gathered and one of them offered that they meet in his home as a refuge from the frequent showers during this time of year.

In yet another village, some 60 or more marvel at the possibility of sins forgiven, of assurance of eternal life, and of power over evil. The simplicity of Christ stands in stark contrast to the external ritualistic ceremonies of Islam which have done nothing to transform their hearts or relieve them from the dread of evil and of death.

Questions abound: "What kind of meat do the Christians eat?" "How do you do ablution [ceremonial washing] before you worship?" "Is it possible to hunt animals in the forest without offending Jesus?" "Are Mohammad and Jesus the same person?" "Which came first, the Bible or the Qur'an?"

They are surprised at the message of worshiping God in Spirit and in truth apart from rigid external rites. It is amazing to them that Christians do not require a special "holy" building in which to pray. Yet they readily understand that outward ceremony is powerless to transform the heart and even irrelevant if one's character continues in malice, corruption, and greed.

No arguments are found in their mouths when they are told that any religion that has not given them freedom from guilt, delivered them from fear of death, granted them assurance of eternal life, and has not produced love, peace, and joy within is the wrong religion. And without controversy, Islam can secure none of these things; and they all know that it hasn't.

And thus the gospel is readily listened to. It is preached following the pattern of Christ Himself, using simple and direct illustrations from the Gospels to pierce to the depths of human need in order to awaken the realization of the soul's need as well as the sufficiency of the Lord Jesus to alleviate the ravages of sin.

Such preaching occupies several nights weekly after the villagers have returned from their farms and have finished the last of their daily Islamic prayers.

At home, Patti regularly has children ranging in age from five to in their late teens coming for lessons in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Invariably they hear a gospel message, have Bible verses to memorize, and receive practical instruction on a whole spectrum of godly living in addition to their academics.

By the time you will have received this update, our son Timothy will have returned to the USA in order to begin his college studies in Bellingham, WA where he will be staying with our oldest son and his wife, Andy and Adriana. He will be most encouraged to hear from you as he begins this new phase of his life.

Do continue to pray for us all as we endeavor to bring the Word of life to the perishing and raise up faithful disciples whom we anticipate the Lord will be willing to send into His harvest.

With all our love,

Steve and Patti

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“We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as  
bondservants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5)

“You also joining in helping us through your prayers” (2 Cor. 1:11)